

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 00757 120526Z
ACTION AID-59

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0757

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID, LA
SUBJECT: EMERGENCY FOOD AID TO LAOS

REF: STATE 161832 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY:

EMERGENCY FOOD AID SHIPMENTS TO LAOS ARE GOING WELL. HOWEVER, THE UNDP RES REP TELLS US THAT AS A RESULT OF A WFP DECISION NOT TO MAKE THE PURCHASES WHICH WERE OFFSET BY OUR CONTRIBUTION, OUR RICE WILL NOT RPT NOT RESULT IN ANY INCREASE IN FOOD AID TO LAOS. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT ROME ATTEMPT TO FIND OUT HOW WFP WOULD RESPOND IF THE LAO SHOULD POINT OUT TO THEM THAT THERE WAS STILL A FOOD SHORTFALL. END SUMMARY.

1. A UN OFFICIAL WHO RECENTLY VISITED SAVANNAKHET IN SOUTHERN LAOS REPORTS THAT THE EMERGENCY FOOD IMPORT AND DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM IS GOING EXTREMELY WELL. COMMODITIES ARE CROSSING THE MEKONG FROM MUKADAHAN TO SAVANNAKHET AT A RATE OF UP TO 400 TONS A DAY. THE AID-BUILT WAREHOUSES IN SAVANNAKHET ARE BEING WELL USED, AND THE COMMODITIES
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ARE BEING TRUCKED TO FOOD-SHORT UPCOUNTRY AREAS WITH LITTLE DELAY. MEANWHILE, AUSTRALIAN-DONATED COMMODITIES ARE BEING SHIPPED ACROSS THE MEKONG AT VIENTIANE.

2. THE UNDP RESREP HERE IN VIENTIANE IS LESS SANGUINE, HOWEVER, ABOUT THE POSSIBLE POLITICAL SIDE EFFECTS OF THE 10,000 TON U.S. RICE CONTRIBUTION. AS SET FORTH IN THE

REFTEL, WFP/ROME HAS INDICATED THAT THE U.S. CONTRIBUTION HAD ALLOWED THEM TO OFFSET A CASH PURCHASE WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN REQUIRED HAD THE U.S. DONATION NOT BEEN FORTHCOMING. WFP CASH RESERVES WERE THUS REPLENISHED SO AS TO PERMIT FURTHER PURCHASES. HOWEVER, THE RESREP TELLS US THAT WFP/ROME HAS INFORMED HIM THAT NO SUCH PURCHASES ARE PLANNED.

3. IN OTHER WORDS, ACCORDING TO THE RESREP, UNLESS THE WFP CHANGES ITS CURRENT STANCE AND REOPENS THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER PURCHASES, THE U#2 . CONTRIBUTION WILL RESULT IN NO RPT NO INCREASE IN FOOD AID TO LAOS OVER THAT WHICH THEY HAD ALREADY BEEN PROMISED FROM THE WFP AND FROM OTHER DONORS. THE APPROXIMATELY 32,500 TON NATIONWIDE SHORTFALL DESCRIBED IN VIENTIANE 600 WILL STILL EXIST DESPITE OUR CONTRIBUTION.

4. THE RESREP SAID JULY 11 THAT HIS SITUATION HAD FED THE SKEPTICISM RECENTLY EXPRESSED TO HIM BY MA KHAIKHAMPHITOUN, LAO MINISTER OF PLAN. MA HAD COMMENTED TO THE RESREP THAT THE U.S. CONTRIBUTION WAS AN ENCOURAGING STEP TOWARD IMPROVEMENT OF LAO-U.S. RELATIONS, BUT EXPRESSED SOME DOUBT THAT THE U.S. FOOD WOULD REALLY ARRIVE. THE RESREP COMMENTED TO US JULY 11 THAT HOWEVER MUCH WE MIGHT PROTEST THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF WFP PLEDGES WAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WFP AND NOT THE USG, WE WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE ABLE TO AVOID THE CHARGE THAT WE WERE SOMEHOW INVOLVED IN THE WFP'S NOT FULFILLING ITS COMMITMENTS. AS A RESULT OF THE WFP'S
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ACTION, THE RESREP SAID THAT HENCEFORTH HE WOULD DO WHAT HE COULD TO SEE THAT ALL UN-ADMINISTERED FOOD AID WAS CHanneled THROUGH SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AS UNICEF AND UNHCR, NOT RPT NOT THE WFP.

5.I COMMENT: WE HAVE NO WAY OF BEING REALLY SURE OF THE ACCURACY OF WHAT THE RESREP IS SAYING TO US. THE WFP HAS CONFIRMED (REFTEL) THAT OUR CONTRIBUTION OFFSET A CASH PURCHASE THEY WOULD HAVE HAD TO MAKE, BUT WE DO NOT KNOW HOW STRONG A COMMITMENT THE WFP BELIEVES IT MADE TO THE LAO TO MAKE SUCH PURCHASES. WE KNOW FROM OUR OWN EXPERIENCE IN THE PAST THE RESREP HAS CONSIDERED VARIOUS POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM POSSIBLE DONORS TO BE "PLEDGES" OR "COMMITMENTS" WHEN THEY WERE REALLY NO SUCH THING.

6. IT MIGHT THUS BE USEFUL IF EMBASSY ROME COULD CHECK WITH WFP/ROME TO FIND OUT WHETHER THEY BELIEVE THEY MADE A COMMITMENT TO PURCHASE FOOD FROM THEIR OWN RESOURCES FOR THE LAO. IT MIGHT ALSO BE USEFUL TO FIND OUT HOW THE WFP PLANS TO RESPOND IF THE LAO POINT OUT TO THEM THAT THERE IS STILL A 32,500 TON NATIONWIDE FOOD SHORTFALL.
ROBERTS

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